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"We must cease to be strangers to the social problems of people . . . we should be able to accomplish more in the control of fire if only we will set our minds to it."

James K. Mace, in a talk to the Southern California Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens expressed his views on fire and its relationship to the total entity of Southern California. His remarks should be of interest to many News Letter readers.

Since much of the color and flavor would be lost in excerpting or briefing the decision was made to reproduce Deputy Mace's talk in its entirety.

FUEL TREATMENT AND LAND MANAGEMENT IN THE WATERSHEDS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

"Fuel Treatment and Land Management in the Watersheds of Southern California"could just as well have been titled "Crossroads" or "New Horizons." It all means that fire control has come of age, that the population expansion into our limited mountainous lands has brought us face to face with a new era.

If we are to change the direction we have been traveling toward disaster, the educators with all their related disciplines must be brought to bear upon the fire problem. Science and technology must furnish us with new tools and new understanding. We must cease to be strangers to the social problems of the people.

Our area of work is fast becoming not one of trees or vegetative cover, but of people, lives, and property. In the words of Dr. Daniel G. Aldrich, Jr., Chancellor of the Irvine Campus and former Dean of Agriculture for the University of California, "Fire is another of the increasing vulnerabilities of our more crowded life..." ..."Fire, then, is a social problem. In Southern California nothing could be more obvious than that problems brought by the density of people will not be going away."

The February, 1963, Population Projection, distributed by the Department of Finance, shows that we can expect nearly fifteen million people to be living in Southern California by 1975 -- or a 50 percent increase in population in less than twelve years. How to absorb these people in such an ever-increasingly hazardous environment without creating conditions that would lead to a natural holocaust and disaster is our problem.

"Fire" and "Flood" are two of the most awesome words in the English language, and we in Southern California are well acquainted with both of them. We have spent millions from revenue bonds and other appropriations in flood prevention, and we have had some of the best engineers in the world working for years in resolving this problem. It has been years since a destructive flood has hit Southern California, but our interests have not waned.

Although we have made some progress in fire control, every year fires continue to sweep over the brush- and timber-covered lands, rendering a destructive toll that can only be measured in the millions of dollars and is a constant threat to life. Surely, if we can, through scientific teamwork, send missiles into the universe, construct a hydrogen bomb, and practically wipe out a terrible and crippling disease, we should be able to accomplish more in the control of fire if only we will set our minds to it.

We have made progress in the last ten years. The first big step was in 1953, when the Principles of Wildland Management for Southern California were brought into being as a result of a study by a special committee under the leadership of the Conservation Association of Southern California. At the same time, the U. S. Forest Service recharted their course for the National Forest lands. The next step was the preparation of the Facts Bulletin by the forest fire agencies regarding the forest and brush fire problems in Southern California watersheds in 1955. We cannot discount the continuous effort of the Southern California Watershed Fire Council in securing more National and State monetary recognition to our problems.

The big step forward was the action by the Southern California Regional Association of County Supervisors at their Furnace Creek Inn meeting at Death Valley in March, 1960, at which time, they requested a master plan for our forest and wildland areas for fire safety. Standards for a Master Plan were adopted at their Santa Maria meeting in January, 1962. This action gave direction to the forest firefighting services and to the planning commissions.

During this last three years, through a standards committee, there have been prepared recommended fire protection standards for the protection of life and property where new construction is to be undertaken in subdivisions, public and private camps, and similar uses involving human occupancy. Although some of these standards might be considered somewhat restrictive by builders, it is most gratifying to hear the construction people give their hearty endorsement to such things as adequate ingress and egress into subdivision areas in wildlands, adequate clearance of vegetative fuels, and other safety measures.

The planning departments' understanding of the highly inflammable vegetative cover of our mountain lands and the ever-present fire threat to their future development cannot be over-emphasized. All recreational programs, industrial construction plans, and actual living space for people must have the fire problem as the common denominator.

The work now going on in San Bernardino County through their workshops is truly a milestone in facing up to the serious wildland problem. On April 16, after several public hearings, the Board of Supervisors adopted the California Fire Chiefs' Uniform Fire Code in ordinance form with minor amendments to fit their needs. They are now developing a reasonable application of the Wildland Master Plan for adoption in ordinance form. The Board of Supervisors of Orange County is now considering a Wildland Fuelbreak Systems Program. Los Angeles County recently completed a new look at their entire fire problem, which has resulted in a new, far-reaching, and accelerated plan which calls for a $10-million capital improvement outlay over the next seven years.

All of our county planners today are very much concerned with the wildland fire problem. A report has just been completed on the North Mountain Project in Riverside County showing what can be done in the breaking up of vast brush fields. San Diego County continues to work on their supplementary fuelbreak land treatment.

But much more must be done. All the counties in Southern California have reached certain stages of accomplishment on their respective wildland master planning standards, but there is still a long way to go.

People may feel that the fire safety measures to govern new developments covering life and property should be on a State basis. Unfortunately, the State of California is not a uniformly hazardous area -- nor are the developments into the wildlands of any similar nature. A certain fire exposure hazard to structural practices may be acceptable in Del Norte or Humboldt Counties; but in the built-up and mountainous lands of Southern California, the same practices could be criminal. The degree of calculated risk must be acceptable to a reasonable person before exposing his loved ones to the fire hazards in our mountain lands.

Fire authorities are of the opinion that these lands cannot be developed to their optimum unless planners and developers recognize the need for fire safety measures. Most laws to bring these about can best be accomplished at the local level or through county ordinances.

The population expansion is happening at a time when our entire mountainous area of Southern California is going through one of the most serious drought conditions of all time. Much of the present vegetation is not receiving enough moisture to perpetuate itself. Thus our mountains, over the years, have become a vast tinderbox that needs special treatment now to be truly habitable.

Because of the limited areas, the many uses and values, and the interests at stake, we must program now with some degree of adequacy for all concerned. The actions we take today are the ones we must live with tomorrow. Once the priorities and directions are established and the mistakes are made, we will have to live with them.

Southern California problems are not static. If there is one thing that is certain, it is change -- a change that every day increases the seriousness of our problems. This direction toward disaster must be brought under control.

In the past, we have placed our major attention to building a fire organization for the prevention and suppression of fires. We have constantly worked to increase our skills and techniques, to improve our knowledges and firefighting tools; but this is not enough. We have tried to attack the entire problem with only 36 percent of the potential effective effort. It is time for us to change our entire thinking in forest fire protection and think in terms of the 100 percent job.

The fire services first came into being as the volunteer bucket brigade to save the community and the lives of the citizens from the fire enemy. First we had volunteers to protect the settlement, the town, and the community; and as our cities became more complex and congested, the need arose for professional firemen.

To split the financial burden in order to lessen the personal loss from fire, insurance companies came into being. After years of study and analysis, the importance of elements in an over-all fire defense were given their proper place in order that the insurance venture would be a profitable undertaking. When you consider the entire fire defense problem of the city, it is hard to understand why the fire department -- with all its men and equipment, with the highest degree of efficiency in prevention and suppression, and the finest motorized equipment and adequate staffing -- rates only 36 percent of the total fire protection job by insurance standards. Such things as water supply, alarm systems, building departments, structural conditions and allied services make up the other 64 percent of the whole.

Because of the crowded conditions in our wildlands, the fire vulnerability has become overwhelming. No longer does the fire control organization enjoy the advantages of selecting time and place to most effectively execute suppression action. We must recognize that additional foothill and mountain developments, population increases, and new fire starting conditions have forced us to consider all of the important elements in an over-all fire defense in the wildlands similar to the standards developed for cities by the National Board of Fire Underwriters.

When the Southern California Regional Association of County Supervisors undertook to develop guidelines for fire safety standards, they were working in the area of a master plan for fire protection for our mountains and wildlands. The program objectives can be summarized pretty much as a 4-point plan --

1. The fire hazard zoning in wildlands to create standards for public use in areas where life could be endangered. This implies fire safety standards for residential and commercial developments, subdivisions and single occupancy. This recognizes priority of use and values of specific wildland area units based on watershed values, recreation needs, residential and commercial development possibilities, and wilderness areas.

2. Land treatment. Adequate fire safety standards for wildland recreational areas, both private and government-owned, which include fuelbreaks, access roads, safety islands, water supplies, heliports, etc.

3. Bring the firefighting agencies of Federal, State, and Local government up to firefighting strength commensurate with the forest and watershed fire problem. This calls for effective coordination of the responsible fire agencies for cooperative effort and maximum efficiency to obtain complete integration during periods of mutual aid and emergency conditions.

4. An adequate forest fire research program. Research has brought into being the use of chemicals and the air tanker which are doing much to augment the standard firefighting tools. New knowledge of fire behavior is being put into use; but to date, there is not an adequate approach to the research possibilities in finding additional firefighting tools and needed fire behavior understanding.

This 4-point program truly encompasses the problem as a whole. In addition to adequate fire suppression forces, such systems as fuelbreaks, access roads, and water storage must be coordinated with building and subdivision standards, rubbish disposal, fire prevention and building codes, zoning ordinances and vegetative clearances. These and others are the sum total for an integrated planning job involving many agencies and departments of government.

We have made some good progress, but it is now time to take another step forward. Are we thinking big enough in fireproofing highways? What about green belts and priority of water? Maybe this is the place -- maybe this should be the first step for use of reclaimed water. What about our outdoor playgrounds? Surely there are thousands of acres that can be or are yet to be developed. What about industrial sites in our foothills? And thousands of homes can be built in our wildlands, but we should take care that we do not create another Bel Air.

On April 26, the Southern California Regional Association of County Supervisors made another step forward towards their goal of obtaining an adequate fire defense plan for our mountain lands. The key points of the resolution adopted can best illustrate this objective:

"...that an action committee bring forth within the year a program with two basic objectives:

(1) A detailed, fully correlated wildland development master plan which would be presented first to the forest and watershed fire people for a searching analysis to make sure that it is all inclusive. Upon its completion, it should be returned to this group for approval. This should be accomplished within the year.

(2) Be prepared to sponsor -- with, perhaps, a research foundation's support -- a pilot model master plan meeting of a magnitude that would have nationwide importance. Only through such an approach would the full significance be brought to the attention of the people for their support."

This plan, when completed, would encompass the County, State, and U. S. Forest Service responsibilities. This plan should bring in the thinking of the builders, the architects, and the engineers. It should represent the thinking of the industrialists, the recreationists, the water people -- in fact, it should encompass all the land uses, needs, and interests of Southern California.

No program of the magnitude needed could be attained without the complete support of the public; therefore, the key to public understanding and needed backing entails an educational and informational plan with a wide effect and a strong impact. This means the support of newspapers, radio, television, and all information media.

Surely Southern California is capable of leading the way in the solving of its problems. County government cannot wait for State and National leadership. It is Southern California's people who are affected. It is Southern California's mountains that are at stake. Without local personal interest, no full understanding can be obtained and our great developments for the future will not be achieved.

We must realize that never before in history has a cililization endured under such unfavorable conditions as prevail here in Southern California, on the edge of a desert. The ancient Mediterranean Region, which is so similar to ours, is a grim reminder. Although man has tried for thousands of years to develop a lasting civilization, his past knowledges and actions have doomed him to failure. Are we to repeat that history? Or can we really face up to our problem and recognize that through our vast scientific and technological knowledge we can accomplish a compatibility of man and nature which has never been obtained before. We have made progress in flood protection. Isn't it time we made the same progress in forest fire protection?

As Foresters and Fire Wardens, pioneering in fire control is not new to us. We have all participated in some of the big steps forward in fire control in the last few years. The large-scale chemical attack on forest fires from the air and the use of helicopters as firefighting tools were developed in this area. Many fire research efforts have come from Operation FIRESTOP, the combined application of a team effort led by the watershed firefighting people of Southern California. This effort has focused national attention on the potentials of science and technology in fire control.

It is again time to establish a central nucleus around which all the different areas of educational discipline may work. We must consider the proper priorities of land engineering, recreation, water, and vegetative cover. Even with the increasing encroachment into the wildlands of millions of people and growing industry -- with its complicated new plastics, chemicals, explosive and even fissionable materials with the potential for disaster -- we can insure in the next ten or fifteen years a direction for solving the fire problem for Southern California which will also establish guidelines for the entire nation.

We can accomplish all of this if we in the forest fire services continue to strive for the new horizons -- as we recognize that what we do now is vital to the future -- and if we are ready to take the leadership that is necessary for action now.

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